DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 253 264 JC 840 619

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TITLE Critical Thinking and Community College Students.
PUB DATE Mar 84
NOTE 29p.; Paper presented at the Annual National Conference of the National Association for Developmental Education (8th, Philadelphia, PA, March 8-10, 1984).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Cognitive Development; Community Colleges; *Learning Processes; *Remedial Instruction; *Sequential Learning; Teaching Methods; Two Year Colleges; *Two Year College Students; *Writing Instruction

ABSTRACT

Drawing from basic assumptions about learning and critical thinking skills, this paper suggests a teaching method for helping community college students to use their critical thinking capacity in their college courses. First, a series of assumptions commonly held by teachers about the nature of learning are presented, and contrasted with assumptions about learning that are supported by research. The next sections discuss the implications of these research findings for instruction, arguing that when students fail to do critical or abstract thinking about a subject, it may be that they lack the requisite concrete knowledge specific to that subject; and that time and opportunity must be provided in the curriculum and the classroom for students to acquire the necessary foundation of basic, concrete knowledge and skills before being faced with lectures, readings, and tasks that require critical or abstract thinking. Appended material begins with a lecture to be given to students in the first week of a course which discusses the steps to be taken in learning new materials or skills. Next, samples of student work from a pre-college developmental writing course are provided, illustrating student progress in an 11-week quarter. Charts are then presented showing the causal sequence of learning and a natural learning, instructional sequence model for teaching one topic, skill, or rule. Finally, a sample learning sequence for identifying independent and dependent clauses and an evaluation form for student writing are presented. (LAL)

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CRITICAL THINKING AND COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS

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Presented at the 8th Annual National Conference of the National Association for Developmental Education, March 8-10, 1984, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

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Critical Thinking and Community College Students

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March 1984

The ability to do critical thinking exists in all normally developed adults. That is, normally developed adults, in their jobs and hobbies, commonly analyze, synthesize, and evaluate.

If this is true, then why aren't all of our normally developed adult students thinking at this level in our classes? Why do some of them seem incapable of this kind of thinking about their academic subjects?

Many of us community college instructors lament--or agonize over--our students' apparent inability to think analytically, to synthesize, to creatively apply material presented in our lectures or in their textbooks. We want to know what is wrong with them. We want to develop or remediate them. We want to test them so we can place them more appropriately in courses and programs. We want to have entrance requirements and stiffer standards to weed out of the degree and certificate programs those who seem to lack the ability to do critical thinking at the college level.

However, a look at how the human mind acquires new knowledge suggests not only an answer to what is wrong with "underthinking" adults students, but also a teaching method for helping them make use of their critical thinking capacity in their college courses.

Assumptions about Learning

Many of us base our teaching on what we assume to be the nature of learning. For example:

1. The mind is a receptive container or sponge into which knowledge is to be put. Once the knowledge is put into the mind, the learner will be able to use it.
2. Real teaching is done by teachers imparting knowledge to students. The better the teacher pre-digests and pre-synthesizes the material, the more logically the teacher organizes the material, the more clearly the teacher communicates, the more entertaining the presentation, the more successful will be the imparting of knowledge into the minds of the students.
3. If the teacher does all the above and the students still cannot understand or use the material, then the students do not have the ability to think at higher levels. Either their cognitive development is inadequate (i. e., they do not have the intelligence or talent to be college students) or they lack basic communication, computation, study, and/or thinking skills. If the last assumption is held, the further assumption is that once having acquired the missing skills the students will be able to succeed at understanding and using material teachers impart into their minds.
4. Once a student achieves mastery in one subject or skill, that student is automatically able to perform at a high level in another subject or skill. If a student cannot, then the student lacks the capacity for the second subject, e. g., the student is right brained and can do art but can't write.
5. The proper sequence for teaching is that, first, the teacher should give the whole synthesized overview in a lecture, should give definitions, background, technical terms, demonstrations, and reading assignments. As a result of these activities, the students should understand and be able to use the material. Finally, the students should be able to take a test to prove they have understood.

6. Learning is pleasant for students only when the teacher or the materials or learning aids are entertaining, full of variety, challenging, exciting. Otherwise, the natural frustration and/or boredom of learning will militate against students learning, except for students with aptitude or exceptional motivation or perseverance.

What Some Research Has Shown

Research seems to show that all those assumptions are probably invalid. Valid assumptions seem to be as follows:

1. Apparently, mastery is not transferable from one subject or topic to another, but each subject must be learned in its own right. We all realize that just because you are a nuclear physicist with high-powered critical thinking skills in physics you cannot, in a few months, become a critical thinker in the field of economics--if previously you had never studied economics and, consequently, had had no concrete knowledge of the basic elements of this subject and no skill in the methodology of this discipline. In other words, mastery or critical thinking in one subject does not make it possible for a person automatically to do critical thinking in another subject (Wintz).

   It is not so clear, however, that the same nontransferability of level of development is true for learners at each level of development in each subject. That is, a student who has acquired, in an English composition course, adequate college level writing skills might not be able immediately to write adequate papers for a philosophy course--if that student had never studied philosophy before and, consequently, began the philosophy course with no concrete knowledge of the basic information, concepts and methods of that subject.

   Piaget's research, a cornerstone of modern developmental psychology, led him to theorize that there are six levels of development through which a learner (either an infant or an adult learner) must progress, from lack of awareness of a concept or skill to full understanding and application of that concept or skill (Bringuier, Piaget 1969, 1970, Flavell).

   It is interesting to note that almost identical levels have been identified in the taxonomies that have been formulated to describe all kinds of human development, e.g., from moral to psychomotor, from affective to cognitive (Bloom, Erikson, Harrow, Kohlberg, Krathwohl, Phipps 1981).

   By extrapolating from these Piagetian levels, we can identify six levels through which students must progress from lack of knowledge of a subject to authentic, internalized understanding and purposeful application of the concepts and skills of the subject (Phipps 1981, 1982, 1984). See pp. 5, 10.

2. The mind's natural and preferred procedure for acquiring new knowledge is to actively grope and correct (experiment) with the new material or methods. That is, the mind naturally prefers to gain personal, concrete familiarity with the nature and operation of new subjects. Thus, authentic, internalized knowledge is based on personal, concrete experiences specific to the new topic or subject (Bringuier, Rogers, Bruner, Wintz). See step 1, p. 5.

3. Learning occurs contiguously; that is, new knowledge builds on, transforming and being formed by, already acquired knowledge. (Bruner, Bringuier, Piaget 1969). See pp. 5, 10.

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4. People learn what they grope and correct about, experiment with and practice; e. g., if students in an English as a Second Language course practice answering questions in grammar workbooks, they become good at answering questions in grammar workbooks. But this mastery is not transferable to their being good at their own self-generated speaking and writing. To become good at their own writing and speaking, they need personally to grope and correct as they attempt to communicate their own ideas to others (Terrell). See p. 5.
5. The six levels (see 2, above, and page 5, between steps 3 and 4) seem to be divided into two phases. Piaget, for example, was very clear about making this kind of distinction (Piaget 1969, Flavell, Scandura):
   The first phase: acquiring a substructure or store of concrete, low level subject-specific knowledge and skill through personal, hands-on experience.
   The second phase: critical or abstract thinking about that foundation or substructure of store of subject-specific concrete knowledge and skill that has been acquired.
6. People naturally love to learn.

Without a basic store of concrete knowledge the learner has nothing to think ABOUT; for, it seems, we can think at a high level about only what we already know concretely (Scandura, Bruner).

Implications That Might be Drawn from These Assumptions

Without a preacquired store or foundation of concrete knowledge about a subject, students will be at a disadvantage in a college course about that subject if the instructor assumes--and expects--that any reasonably intelligent adult can immediately do critical or abstract thinking about any subject. Lectures and reading assignments based on this assumption will be over these students' heads. (See Appendix C.)

On the other hand, students with the advantage of having acquired, in previous courses, that basic foundation will be able to understand lectures and readings that assume and expect the ability to do critical thinking about the subject.

Thus, when students fail to do critical or abstract thinking in a subject it may be that they lack the requisite concrete knowledge specific to that subject. If they have not had the opportunity to acquire low level, subject-specific, concrete knowledge and skill, they will not have the wherewithall--any knowledge in their minds--to do critical thinking ABOUT.

For students in this position, perseverance and motivation become the critical factors: students who persevere long and hard enough will eventually acquire enough concrete knowledge and skill to have something to think about.

Implications for Instruction

Students must move from their initial contact with a new subject--when their minds are more or less empty of knowledge and skill that are specific to that subject--to acquire the concrete knowledge and to practice the basic skills that are specific to it. (See Appendix B.)

Administration should allow time and provide opportunities in the curriculum--and instructors should allow time and provide opportunities in their programs or courses--for students new to the curriculum, program or course to acquire the necessary foundation of basic, concrete knowledge and skills specific to their subjects. This should be done before lectures, readings and tasks that require critical and abstract thinking are presented or assigned--and before critical thinking is expected of these students.

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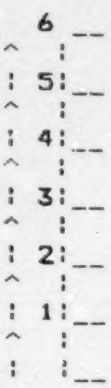
A Lecture to be Given to Students in the First Week of a Course

Research has shown that when learners understand the processes by which they think and learn (Piaget, Scandura), they gain more control over the quality of their work and, thus, their ability to succeed.

(Draw this diagram on the board for students to copy into their notebooks. Emphasize that copying material from the board with exactness is an important study skill.)



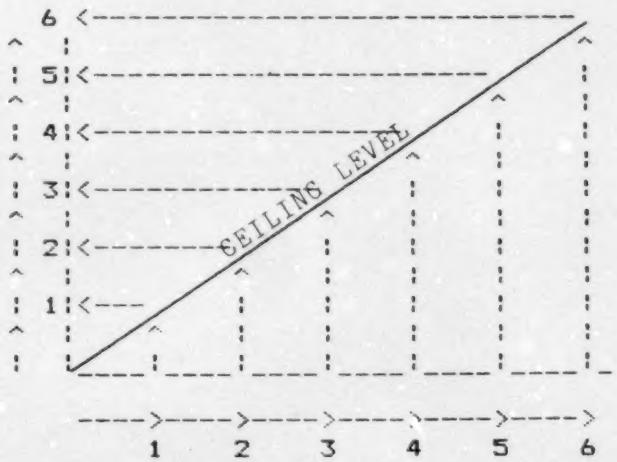
Levels of Understanding

(See over)

These are levels of understanding from low to high with the higher ones built step by step, level by level, on the lower ones. To get to the higher ones, a person must first go through the lower ones, one at a time and leaving none out. Students starting a new course are at the first and lowest level, and at the end of the course hope to be at the highest level.

There is, however, a time and practice factor so that only if and when the learner spends time practicing at each level can she or he move up to the next level of understanding.

(The teacher should now add the horizontal vector, reminding the students to copy the diagram as exactly as possible.)



Time and Practice

To advance in understanding from understanding level 1 to understanding level 2, the student has to spend time and do work (along the time and practice line) to make that advance. You want to get to understanding level 3? Then you have to work and spend time practicing to get up there. That's how all human beings learn anything new; that's the human learning process.

The names of the steps for learning new material or skills follow:

1. lack of knowledge (need to connect the new material or skill to something you already know)
2. getting familiar (need to grope and correct: try to use the new material or skill, correct mistakes, try again)
3. getting comfortable (need to grope and correct some more so you can become very familiar with the new material or skill).

Now there is a foundation of knowledge in your mind. Now you finally know enough about it to begin to think in depth about it.

4. thinking more in depth (also can now benefit from reading, working in a workbook, listening to a lecture, etc.)
5. using it for your own purposes (produce work of your own choice)
6. expertise (need to keep improving with practise over time)

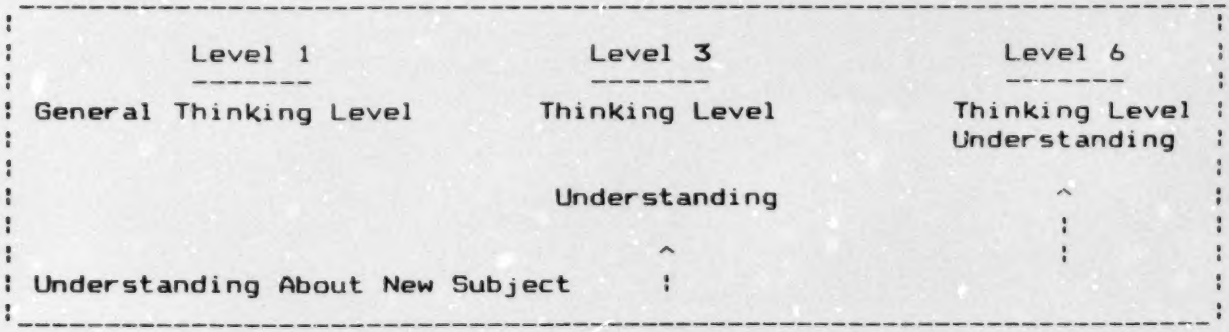
Learners cannot really know more than they have spent time working on; if they do not spend time working on the new topic, they cannot go up to the next higher level of understanding. The only exceptions are learners who have an aptitude (they can move up in understanding with less practice time) or learners who come to a topic with some past knowledge that they acquired in an earlier learning experience.

Adult students are in the upper right corner in life in general or in other skills and, therefore, feel frustrated learning the new skill from the bottom left corner up. But that is where we must start when learning a new skill or subject. This is the human learning process.

In other words, adult students are capable of thinking at a high level, but their skill and understanding level in any new topic is necessarily and naturally going to be low. This causes frustration because when the students try to use their high level thinking ability on the new subject, it is like using the mighty wheels of a giant earth-moving machine on a tiny piece of new lawn. They will just tear it up and then spin in the mud.

So be patient. Keep your desire to think more deeply about this new subject on the back burner until your understanding level in this subject has increased.

(Then draw this diagram on the board for them to copy. Emphasize that copying correctly from the board is an important study skill.)



APPENDIX B

Following are several examples of student work from a first level, pre-college developmental writing course. The samples show the progress students can experience in one eleven-week quarter.

092
09/26/83

(Assignment at the beginning of the first day of class.)

My strengths as a writer:
Be careful of spelling!

I don't think I have strongs in writing. I have trouble spelling grammar.

My weaknesses as a writer:

I usually write wrong sentence. In one paraghaph I don't know when do I make the puntuation and write good sentence.

Why I want to improve my writing:

I need to learn how to write and also I learn to listen. English it is second my language. So I want to write a good composition.

I hope this class will help. Have you taken all the ESL classes recommended to foreign students?.

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Name.
Date : 09/28/83

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(Assignment at the conclusion of the first day of class.)

In the writing I strong about word but I weak the puntuation. gramma, Then I would like to improve more about that.

(Assignment prior to mid-quarter)

092
10 - 25 - 1983.

I am ~~studying~~ English with Mrs Phills. She is a good ~~teacher~~. She was helping me and ~~anybody~~ everybody. She's always correct the ~~my~~ sentences if I had been writting wrong. I ~~am~~ ~~enjoying~~ studying in her class. I have done home work, before I ~~come~~ came to class. I think ~~that~~ that make ~~she~~ her feel happy.

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(Final assignment)

092

12 - 15 - 1993

KEY: WW = weakening word (subordinating conjunction)
P and OP = preposition and object of preposition
SC = sentence completer (direct object or complement)

NOTE: Since the infinitive looks like a prep. phrase, it is treated as one.

WW S V SC S V P OP
After I left my country, I lived in Singapore.

S V SC P OP S V S.C.
I lived there about three months. I like there,

WW S V SC P OP S V
because I had a lot of friends. They were very

adj P OP WW S V SC S
nice, good with me. When I left Singapore. I

V S.C S V S.C
was crying. Sometimes I have leisure; I thought

linker S V S.C P OP
back and I remembered the past time in my life.

P S.C S V S.C
Now, I'm going to school. I try to study English very

adj linker S V S.C
hard and I want to be a Medical Assistant. My

S V adj S V adj
teacher English is very helpfully. She is nice, good

S.C S V P OP S.C P
person. I would like to say thank you for

OP S V SC WW/S V
her help. I won't forget all teachers, who was teaching

SC P OP
me in English.

I try study > makes no sense in English — can't have 2 verbs like that

I | try
to study

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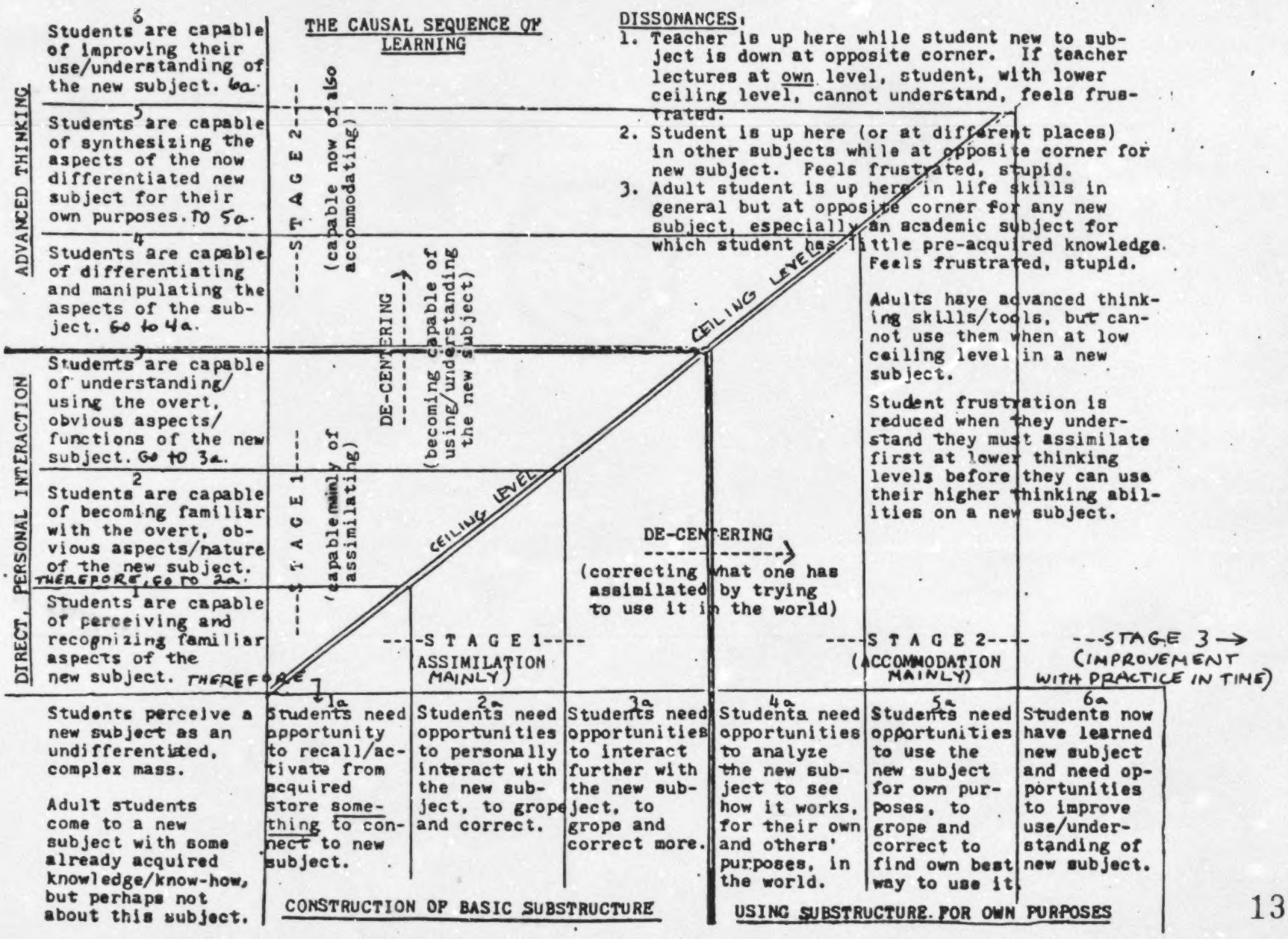

THE CAUSAL SEQUENCE OF LEARNING
DISSONANCES:
1. Teacher is up here while student new to subject is down at opposite corner. If teacher lectures at own level, student, with lower ceiling level, cannot understand, feels frustrated.
2. Student is up here (or at different places) in other subjects while at opposite corner for new subject. Feels frustrated, stupid.
3. Adult student is up here in life skills in general but at opposite corner for any new subject, especially an academic subject for which student has little pre-acquired knowledge. Feels frustrated, stupid.
Adults have advanced thinking skills/tools, but cannot use them when at low ceiling level in a new subject.
Student frustration is reduced when they understand they must assimilate first at lower thinking levels before they can use their higher thinking abilities on a new subject.
ADVANCED THINKING
DIRECT, PERSONAL INTERACTION
6 Students are capable of improving their use/understanding of the new subject. 6a
5 Students are capable of synthesizing the aspects of the now differentiated new subject for their own purposes. TO 5a
4 Students are capable of differentiating and manipulating the aspects of the subject. Go to 4a
3 Students are capable of understanding/using the overt, obvious aspects/functions of the new subject. Go to 3a.
2 Students are capable of becoming familiar with the overt, obvious aspects/nature of the new subject. THEREFORE, Go to 2a.
1 Students are capable of perceiving and recognizing familiar aspects of the new subject. THEREFORE
STAGE 2 (capable now of also accommodating)
STAGE 1 (capable mainly of assimilating)
DE-CENTERING (becoming capable of using/understanding the new subject)
CEILING LEVEL
CEILING LEVEL
DE-CENTERING (correcting what one has assimilated by trying to use it in the world)
STAGE 1 (ASSIMILATION MAINLY)
STAGE 2 (ACCOMMODATION MAINLY)
STAGE 3 (IMPROVEMENT WITH PRACTICE IN TIME)
Students perceive a new subject as an undifferentiated, complex mass.
Adult students come to a new subject with some already acquired knowledge/know-how, but perhaps not about this subject.
1a Students need opportunity to recall/activate from acquired store something to connect to new subject.
2a Students need opportunities to personally interact with the new subject, to grope and correct.
3a Students need opportunities to interact further with the new subject, to grope and correct more.
4a Students need opportunities to analyze the new subject to see how it works, for their own and others' purposes, in the world.
5a Students need opportunities to use the new subject for own purposes, to grope and correct to find own best way to use it.
6a Students now have learned new subject and need opportunities to improve use/understanding of new subject.
CONSTRUCTION OF BASIC SUBSTRUCTURE
USING SUBSTRUCTURE FOR OWN PURPOSES

NATURAL LEARNING: INSTRUCTIONAL SEQUENCE MODEL FOR TEACHING ONE TOPIC, SKILL, OR RULE

TOPIC/SKILL/RULE _____

1
Students need to make a connection between what they already know and the new topic.

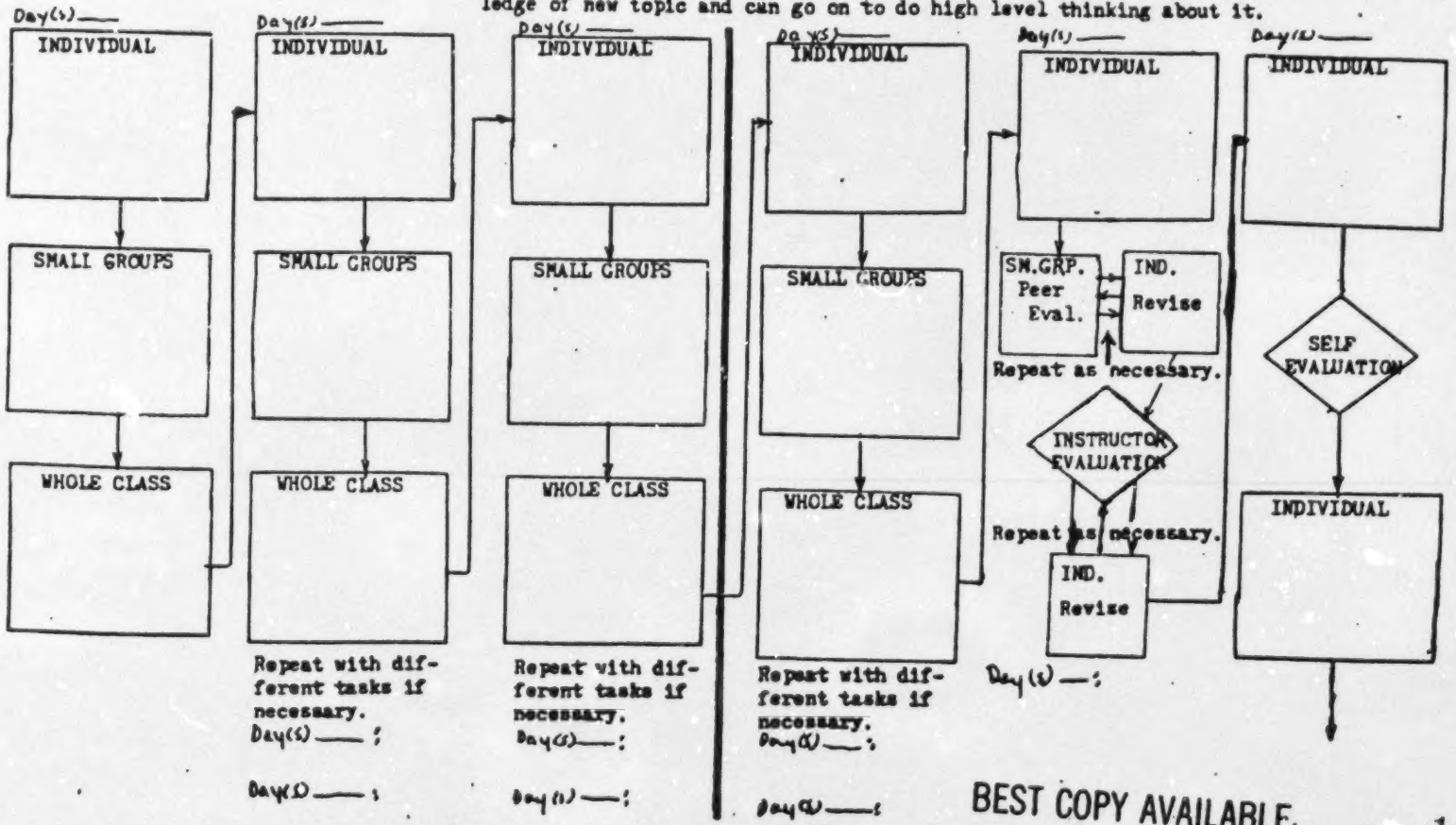
2
Students need to grope and correct to begin to get familiar with obvious, overt aspects of the new topic.

3
Students need to grope and correct further to get more familiar with and consolidate elementary aspects. Now students have foundation of basic knowledge of new topic and can go on to do high level thinking about it.

4
Students need to perform analytical activities on or in regard to new topic. Students need to refine or correct foundation of basic knowledge against reality as they try to use it.

5
Students need to produce topic-related work for their own purposes.

6
Students now have usable knowledge of this topic as part of their mind's store of knowledge, to be used and perfected over time.



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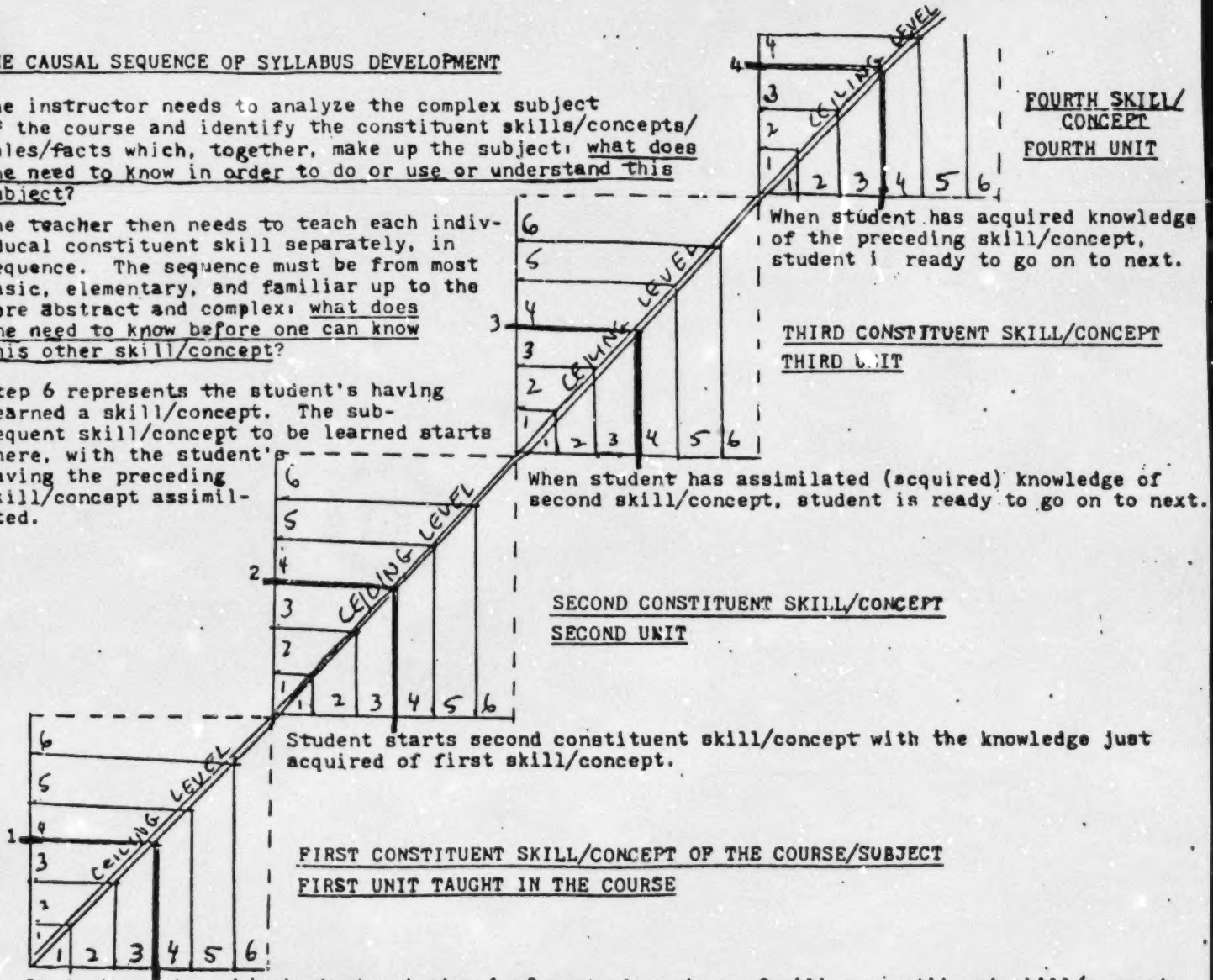
THE CAUSAL SEQUENCE OF SYLLABUS DEVELOPMENT

The instructor needs to analyze the complex subject of the course and identify the constituent skills/concepts/rules/facts which, together, make up the subject: what does one need to know in order to do or use or understand this subject?

The teacher then needs to teach each individual constituent skill separately, in sequence. The sequence must be from most basic, elementary, and familiar up to the more abstract and complex: what does one need to know before one can know this other skill/concept?

Step 6 represents the student's having learned a skill/concept. The subsequent skill/concept to be learned starts there, with the student's having the preceding skill/concept assimilated.



FOURTH SKILL/CONCEPT
FOURTH UNIT

When student has acquired knowledge of the preceding skill/concept, student i ready to go on to next.

THIRD CONSTITUENT SKILL/CONCEPT
THIRD UNIT

When student has assimilated (acquired) knowledge of second skill/concept, student is ready to go on to next.

SECOND CONSTITUENT SKILL/CONCEPT
SECOND UNIT

Student starts second constituent skill/concept with the knowledge just acquired of first skill/concept.

FIRST CONSTITUENT SKILL/CONCEPT OF THE COURSE/SUBJECT
FIRST UNIT TAUGHT IN THE COURSE

Student new to subject starts at step 1 of most elementary, familiar constituent skill/concept of the complex subject. When the student has learned that first constituent skill/concept, the student has acquired (assimilated) new knowledge and is now prepared to go on to the next constituent skill/concept.

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NATURAL LEARNING: INSTRUCTIONAL SEQUENCE MODEL FOR TEACHING ONE TOPIC, SKILL, OR RULE

TOPIC/SKILL/RULE *Recognizing and writing prepositional phrases & diagramming them*

1 Students need to make a connection between what they already know and the new topic.

2 Students need to grope and correct to begin to get familiar with obvious, overt aspects of the new topic.

3 Students need to grope and correct further to get more familiar with and consolidate elementary aspects. Now students have foundation of basic knowledge of new topic and can go on to do high level thinking about it.

4 Students need to perform analytical activities on or in regard to new topic. Students need to refine or correct foundation of basic knowledge against reality as they try to use it.

5 Students need to produce topic-related work for their own purposes.

6 Students now have usable knowledge of this topic as part of their mind's store of knowledge, to be used and perfected over time.

Day(s) 1

INDIVIDUAL
Draw on Board & say - "In as few words as possible tell where the person is - do on scrap paper."

SMALL GROUPS of 3
read each others. Did everyone answer the question?

WHOLE CLASS
① Say "what are some of your statements?"
② Write on board.
③ Write "prepositions" and list the ones used.
④ Tell students to copy in notebook & memorize.
⑤ write "objects of prepositions" and list the ones used. Say there are too many to memorize.

Day(s) 1

INDIVIDUAL
Draw on board as before.
① write p + op & identify them. "This is analyzing."

SMALL GROUPS
① as before.
② walk around to check (P) (OP) under the box

WHOLE CLASS
① as before: add to lists on board.
② Demonstrate: under (P) the box (OP)
Say: "this is diagramming."

Repeat with different tasks if necessary.
Day(s) ___ ;
Day(s) ___ ;

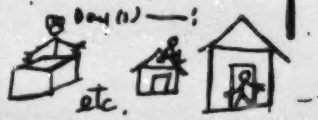
Day(s) 1

INDIVIDUAL
Diagram the "pp" (p + op) you have just written & analyzed.

SMALL GROUPS
compare with others — Did everyone do it right?

WHOLE CLASS
① Have some students put them on the board.
② Review pp = p + op

Repeat with different tasks if necessary. 1, 2 + 3
Day(s) 2 ;
Day(s) ___ ;



etc.

Day(s) 3

INDIVIDUAL
Write pp telling where books are in the room. Analyze & diagram.

SMALL GROUPS
as before

WHOLE CLASS
① as before
② add to lists
Homework: write pp telling where things are in your house. Analyze & diagram. In class, next day, do homework in S.G.'s & W.C. as before.

Repeat with different tasks if necessary.
Day(s) 4 ; with other things & people: eg., Where is someone you know right now?
Day(s) 5 ; Repeat with other things & people. Analyze and diagram each one. Do 3 pp for homework & review in class as before.

Day(s) 6-7

INDIVIDUAL
① Free write for 5 minutes
AFTER 5 MIN
② Now go back & identify, analyze & diagram pp.

SM. GRP. Peer Eval. → IND. Revise

Repeat as necessary.

INSTRUCTOR EVALUATION for next day

Repeat as necessary.

IND. Revise & return for more eval.

Day(s) 7-8 ; as above.

Day(s) 9+

INDIVIDUAL
As students proceed to next unit (subject & verb groups), they will continue to identify, analyze, & diagram prep. phrases.

SELF & teacher EVALUATIONS

INDIVIDUAL
Self corrections on their papers —

TEACHING

If we don't teach to them where they are, they will not understand.
If they are below the ceiling level we start at, is it their fault? Do they, then, deserve to be left out?
If we know where they are, will we think it is important to start there? Or do we choose to let them be left out?
If we think it is important to know where they are so that we can start there, how can we find out?
They can tell us.
Do we provide opportunities for them to tell us? Do we listen? Do we respond?

This question of the students' ceiling level (where it is, how to find out where it is, what we should do about it if it is lowerthan we expected) is a key question.

Rita Phipps
1984

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A SAMPLE LEARNING SEQUENCE: INTRODUCTION TO COMPLEX SENTENCES

Rita Phipps
North Seattle Community College

Day 19

7. Identifying independent and dependent clauses not including relative clauses

Students now have learned slowly, securely, and correctly the basic elements of a clause. It is now possible for them to differentiate between dependent and independent clauses. When they have learned to do that, they will have a foundation of basic knowledge and know-how about the basic sentence. Upon this basic knowledge, then, everything else can be built *relatively* easily and quickly.

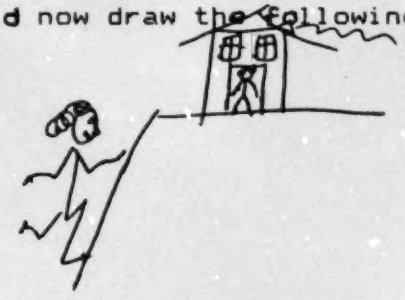
Phase 1

IND.: Here are 2 other terms for you to put in your notebooks: "clause." A clause is a statement that contains somewhere in it one and only one subject-verb group. Any statement that has a subject-verb group somewhere in it is called a clause. Thus, if I ask you to write a clause I am asking you to write a statement that has one and only one subject-verb group somewhere in it. You have been doing this already in your previous papers. This is the name of what you have been doing.

The second term is "phrase." A phrase is any group of words that go together that is not a clause, i. e., a group of words that do not contain a subject-verb group.

Ask the students to recall the phrase they have learned about, the prepositional phrase; ask them to consider why this group of words is called a phrase rather than a clause. (They will answer easily.)

Teacher should now draw the following picture on the board:



INDIVIDUAL WORK: Write one sentence with two very short clauses, one telling what Sandy is doing and the other telling what Dale is doing. Keep it simple because you are going to have to do some things with this sentence later on.

Write this on the board for the students to copy and fill in:

(fill in with 1 clause) (fill in with 1 clause)
_____because_____.

It is important that they write freely, to express their thoughts, rather than by prescription--or proscription. The principle here is that people learn what they practice doing. That is, if we want students to learn how to write independently, to express their ideas and feelings truthfully, clearly and correctly, then *that* is what they must practice doing. (See Terrell.)

But they are asked here to keep their clauses short because the rest of the task will be difficult if their sentence is too long

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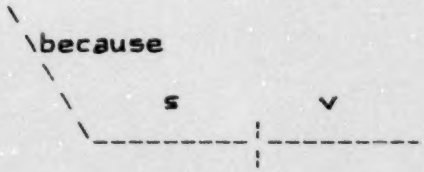
and involved.

After they have written for a few moments, stop them and give these further directions--and it is important that they know they should write freely just for meaning first and then, later, revise for conscious control.

Now go back and diagram each clause separately, diagramming only the words you know. Diagram the first clause as usual:

Then diagram the "because" like this, attaching it above the subject-verb group that follows it:



SMALL GROUPS OF THREE: Read and show your sentences and diagrams to each other. Then see what similarities and differences there are in the ways you put your clauses together to make your statements.

WHOLE CLASS DISCUSSION: Anyone want to put his/hers on the *board?* Have some students put their sentence and diagrams (one for the dependent clause and one for the independent clause). Then ask the class to discuss the similarities and differences. Finally, go over the clauses (does each one have a subject-verb group?) and diagrams (does the "because" stand on the slanted line attached above the subject-verb group is precedes?).

Because this is the beginning of their learning a new sub-topic, the discussions may take longer and the tasks go more slowly than at the end of the previous sub-topic. But that is to be expected, because when learning a new sub-topic, a new mind-store of knowledge has to be developed. This creates a need for the students to proceed slowly, securely, and correctly.

The point that will be discovered, of course, is that there are different ways to write the same information. This is the point that should be stressed, including the reminder that the students are all unique individuals who see and understand things differently--and this is wonderful.

IND.: Now put a circle around the whole clause in your statement that starts with "because." Then put 2 commas inside the circle, one at the start and one at the end of the clause (demonstrate with the work on the board).

, because Dale is waiting at the house, .

S.G.: Share and discuss.

W.C.: Any questions? Problems? Have a few more students put their sentences, diagrams and circles on the board. Go over them and nswer questions students may have. Put on the board any other clauses or sentences or diagrams that they have written that they feel are

problems.

Do not explain beyond what they know from their own previous experience with subject-verb groups.

Do not be tempted to be drawn into what might seem a quick, helpful explanation; it will lead only to a quagmire of confusion. Keep the focus sharp, clear, individuated. Remember, the problem is that the students are not able to differentiate aspects they have not yet learned. If the sharp focus is relaxed, the mass that is still undifferentiated will surge forward again to drown their emerging islands of clarity.

Remember, the central task in learning is becoming able to differentiate the elements of a complex, undifferentiated mass. After the learner can differentiate some elements, the learner can then analyze and synthesize among and across those differentiated elements in all their complex relationships.

IND.: Now go back and read the words on each diagram to yourself. Then decide which diagrammed group of words (the subject-verb group without "because" beginning it and the subject-verb group with "because" beginning it) can make sense standing alone and which cannot.

Emphasize this is not in terms of information (both need more information to be clear) but only in terms of the students' sense of logic or their feeling about its making sense. They might try this method: after each diagrammed group of words they should write "Yes, I see!" If it makes sense, then probably that group of words can stand alone. Or they can see whether they feel like writing, "Yes? And? Then what?" If they feel this, then the clause needs more, cannot stand alone.

Then they should be asked to cross out the "because." They should be asked whether that clause can make sense standing alone now. Do not worry. The majority of the class will feel what can and what cannot stand alone. Go over many of the students' clauses (on the board) so they can get a better and clearer feel for it.

Assure them this is something they will get a feel for after they practice doing it for awhile.

Tell them the rule is that this word ("because") is one of several words that weaken a clause when it goes in front of it. For this reason, the word is called a "weakening word" and the clause is called as "weak clause." These are terms that are descriptive and commonsensical. For this reason, terminology is less of the problem that it usually is and, instead, helps to clarify the sentence.

IND.: Now rewrite your two clauses. Put the "because" in front of the other clause. Diagram your two new clauses using the same method as before.

S.G.: Compare and discuss. Which ones can stand alone and which ones are weak and can't? This discussion, as all the discussions in the first phase of a new topic, might take awhile because the students are laying in a new mind-store about a new topic. Their minds are in the process of constructing new mental structures and memory networks. This does not happen immediately (unless a student has an innate aptitude or has studied this topic before) and requires a great deal of thinking, writing, and talking activity by the students.

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W.C.: As before.

Phase 2

IND.: Repeat with the following drawing on the board:

SANDY JACKIE

IND.: Write a statement that tells what Jackie is doing and also what Sandy is doing at the same time. Fill in the following form as you did before. (Write on the board, as before.)

(1st clause) (2nd clause)

_____while_____.

S.G.: Read to each other and discuss the similarities and differences in how you did it.

W.C.: As before.

IND.: Now circle the clause that begins with "while." Then put commas inside the circle at each end of the clause, as you did before. Finally, diagram all your clauses as before. Make sure the circled clause has the "while" on the slanted line.

S.G.: As before.

W.C.: As before.

, while Jackie takes a bath, .

IND.: As before, they should be asked to determine which diagrammed group of words can stand alone and which is weak and cannot. They should then cross out the "while" to see whether that clause can now stand alone. Now they should diagram their two new clauses.

S.G.: As before.

W.C.: As before. Tell them that "while" is another one of the words that are weakening words when they weaken a clause like this. (Tell them that later they will study a list of weakening words in their textbook.)

Encourage them to use the terms "weakening word" and "weak clause." Also explain that the commas are there because they surround the weak clause and that they will learn more about commas later. For now, they should just get used to putting commas at either end of the weak clause. (Needless to say, they will learn how to use commas correctly around nonrestrictive dependent clauses later on. For now, they are developing basic concept[illegible] of how to identify these clauses and see them as separate chunks. Aft[illegible]his, this will find it relatively easy to modify their use of these [illegible]mas.)

Day 20

Phase 3

IND.: Write a sentence telling what you will do after this class. 1) Include one weak clause with the weakening word "after" in front of it. 2) Circle the weak clause being sure to include the two commas. 3) Then diagram the subject-verb groups in your sentence. Put "after" in the proper place in the diagram of the dependent clause's subject-verb group. (Remember, later students will fine-tune the use of commas with dependent clauses. For now they are only building their store of the most elemental and basic knowledge about complex sentences.)

The teacher should write those directions on the board, as usual, reminding the students that following directions thoroughly and carefully is an important thinking and study skill.

S.G.: Share your sentences and diagrams. Has everyone followed all the directions and done the tasks correctly?

W.C.: As before. Students should now be introduced to the conventions and rules: *sentences that contain a weak clause along with a strong clause are called "mixed" or "complex sentences."*

The only difference between a weak clause and a strong clause is that the weak clause has a weakening word in front of it.

Finally, a sentence has one--and only one--strong clause in it. A weak clause is not--and cannot be--a sentence. By itself, a weak clause is called a "fragment" or only a piece of a sentence.

It needs to be re-emphasized that a "complete" sentence is called that only in the sense of having a strong clause in it; it will not necessarily be complete in the sense of having all the information needed to give the complete idea. Remind them that grammar is made of rules and this is just another rule. It may not make sense to them; but they must obey it anyway if they want their writing to be "correct."

Again, if the students want more in-depth explanations about the reason for these conventions, direct them to a linguistics or advanced writing course.

Phase 4

IND.: Students are to read page 76 and top of page 77 to the paragraph that starts with "Note . . . ." It should be pointed out that some of these words on the list called "subordinating conjunctions" are different from the others (tell them to cross them out for now; these are the relative pronouns) and that they will be studied separately later. Also, they should know that not all the weakening words are included in this list; that is why the "stand alone" test is also needed to identify weak clauses when the weakening word is not one that is on this list.

Then they are to do Exercise 1 on page 78, except #1 and #3, following the directions in the book. They are also to notice where the commas are and understand that when the weak clause is at the start or the end of a sentence, the comma at the start or at the end will be ***INVISIBLE!*** (This helps students see the dependent clauses as separate chunks and later will make learning comma usage easier.)

S.G.: These are, as before, to be shared in the group, two at a time, at each group's own pace. They are to discuss the placement of commas, both invisible and visible.

W.C.: As before.

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Day 21

FOR HOMEWORK: Over the next few days, at their own pace, students are to do Exercise 5 on page 80, except #'s 3 and 5, following the directions in the book. Also Exercise 6, pages 80-81, and Exercise 7 on page 81. Since the answers are in the book, students can do these at their own pace at home. Each day in class, ask whether they have any questions or problems.

Realize that they will not actually learn very much from these exercises. They appreciate having homework but the best learning will come from their actually doing their own writing and analyzing and correcting what they have done in accord with the rules they are working on.

Phase 5

IND.: Write 3 complex sentences about anything you wish. Write without worrying about doing it correctly. You will go back and correct it afterwards. The first writing should always be done freely, just saying what you believe is true and expressing yourself without thinking about any rules or prohibitions. Everything and anything goes! This first draft will not be seen by anybody but yourself: so you can write exactly what you feel, think, believe.

Then circle the weak clause and also the strong clause. Be sure you put in the commas in the weak clause's circle. Then identify the words you know inside each circle (there must be a subject-verb group in each circle!). Finally, diagram both clauses (only the words you know: subject-verb groups, prepositional phrases and weakening words). As you identify the words you know and diagram them, you may need to correct your original sentences.

After you have corrected your sentences, copy all three over again in their correct form to hand in.

This is how real writers write: they write many different drafts, the first ones to try to discover the truth and express themselves, the last ones to go back and correct the grammar, punctuation, and spelling with a fine-toothed comb.

As a result, you, as a writer, will have something you can be proud of! Variations of this method of writing are needed to answer essay test questions, to write reports and papers for college classes, and for all other formal writing purposes.

While they are working, they can come up to the instructor for help.

After approximately 20-30 minutes, interrupt them for a feedback session with their colleagues.

S.G.: As before, read your papers to each other: discuss and check them, helping each other to be clear and correct.

N.C.: As before. Collect papers at the end of class.

Phase 6

Evaluate papers only for rules and directions they have been working on. These must be handed back the following day with as many positive and encouraging remarks as possible. The next day, this exercise (*Phases 5 and 6*) should be repeated for 1-2 days, as needed.

The next sequence will have them moving their dependent and independent clauses around and then inserting the dependent in the middle of the independent. They will write sentences for homework and will write in class as well. In short, after they have successfully built a foundation of basic concepts and skills in this present sequence, they will have the wherewithall to do more high level work with complex sentences.

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ENG-92

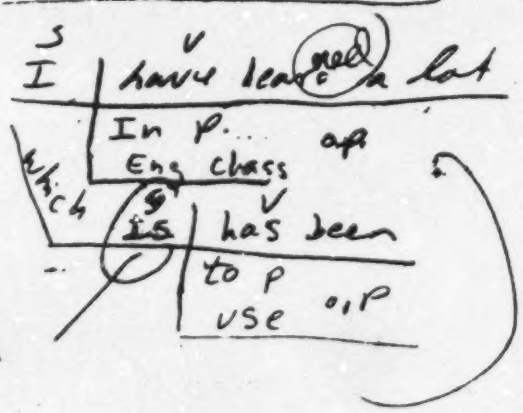
once you get the basic rules under control, you will be able to express your ideas!

S V
I have learned a lot in Eng class.
learned
not a preposition
O.P

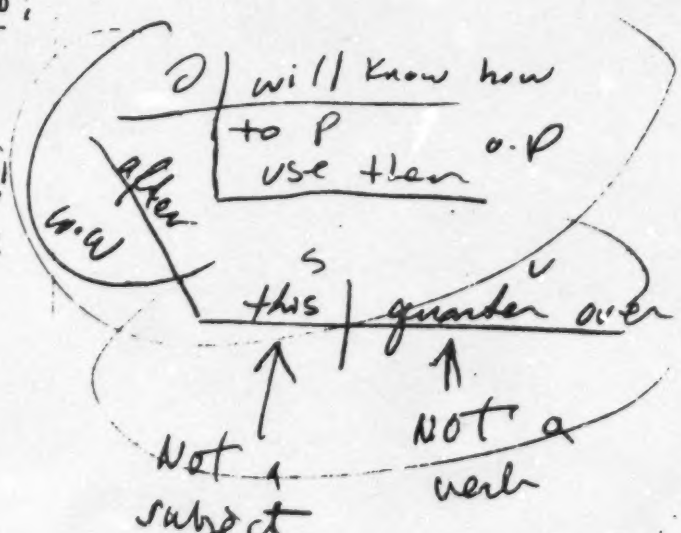
which is has been teaching me to use the prepositional phrase, S-V group, & dependent & independent clause)

dependent clause

often, this grandeur is never
S V
I will know how to use them.
Independent clause



"IS" is a verb!



Good!

This sentence is not under your control. You are not 100% sure of what you are doing. Therefore, make it very short & very simple. You must stop practicing how to write incorrect sentences!! Stop Now!

ENG - 92

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Perfect!

Independent clause (dependent clause)

S V P O.P. P O.P W.W S V

1. I go to school by bus. (while my mother is cooking

P O.P.

at home.)

Independent clause (dependent clause) Independent

S V W.W S V S V

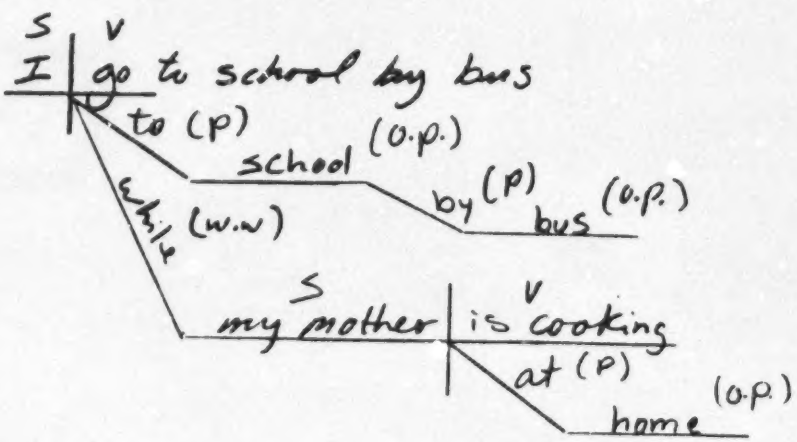
2. I go home, (after my class is over.) I began to

clause (dependent clause)

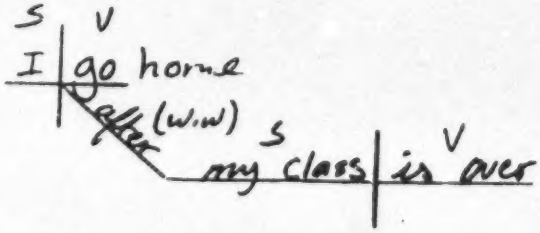
do home work. (after I have eaten dinner.)

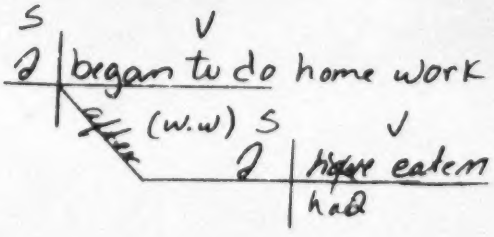
W.W S V

(1)



(2)





ENG 092 EVALUATION SHEET NAME _____
Nov. 3, 1983

1. _____ You understand diagramming and some of your writing is correct. But you need more ESL work. You will not be able to succeed in writing correct English sentences--or in this course--without doing this. See me today to arrange for special work.

2. _____ You have given into the temptation to write above your writing skill level. You cannot improve if you keep giving into this temptation. For now you must forget about writing at your true and high level of intelligence. You must slow down and write down at your skill level, which is at its beginning stage at this point. Only in this way can you definitely improve your skills once and for all. Write simply; write short sentences. Once you have become skillful at this you can begin to go on to higher levels of writing skill.

3. _____ This is almost perfect! By being careful you can write correctly. And you must continue to be verv careful, to think about the rules as you write and rewrite.

4. _____ Your sentences are perfect! Be sure to continue to be careful and continue to think of the rules as you write and rewrite.

5. _____ Your sentences are excellent, but your diagrams are a real problem. This could mean you really don't know why your sentences are correct. Please rediagram the sentences that are diagrammed incorrectly (as noted on your paper) and return to me. (See me if you need help.)

6. _____ Watch your spelling!

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ENG 092
11/14/83

NAME_____

EVALUATION FORM

1._____You are holding firm to your new knowledge and skills by going slowly and carefully. In this way you will continue to progress step-by-step without stopping!

2._____A dangerous time for you! You're starting to rush ahead! You're giving into the temptation of working too fast. Don't! You must hold back and work slowly and carefully to be sure your new knowledge and skills are totally firm. You MUST keep your sentences under control. You MUST keep to the iron rules. You MUST force yourself to go slowly and work step-by-step. This is the ONLY way the human mind learns new skills. By rushing ahead too soon and too quickly, you can get lost.

3._____You have improved a great deal but now you must keep thinking of the rules and keep trying to follow them. Do not slip away from the iron rules! Ask whether what you put in your diagrams makes sense and follows the rules. You must keep your sentences under control! Keep asking the following questions to be sure your sentences are following those iron rules:

a. Is this a prepostion? (check list on p. 59)
b. After the preposition is there a word or several words that answer the question "what?" If there is no s-v group among these words, then I have a prepositional phrase here (p. and o.p.).
c. Now I must cross out this prep. phrase.

d. Now I must find the s-v groups. I must ask: "Who or what is doing or being what?" Do I recognize any well-known verbs like "is"? (I must remember that words ending in _____ing must have a helper in order to be a verb!) See pp. 97, 99, 100.

e. How many s-v groups are there in this sentence? Do any of them have a dependent word (subordinating conjunction) front? If so, it is a DEPENDENT s-v group and cannot be a sentence all by itself. It will need to hang down from an INDEPENDENT s-v group (independent clause). See list, p. 76.

f. How many INDEPENDENT s-v groups (indep. clauses) are there in this sentence? (I must remember there can be only ONE. There must be ONE--but ONLY one.) If I have more than one, then I have to make two sentences (one independent clause in each sentence).

METHOD

1. Write sentence.
2. Identify every word in the sentence itself (use list above).
3. Circle or underline every dependent clause.
4. Then diagram.
5. Copy over sentences if it was necessary to correct them. Is not enough to do it. You need to know what you are doing!

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